SHA'BAN

A MONTH TO WHICH PEOPLE DO NOT PAY ATTENTION

Sha'ban is the name of the (eight) month of the Islamic lunar calendar, and it appears between the months of Rajab and Ramadan.

FASTING IN SHA'BAN:

Ayshah (رضي الله عنها) said:

"THE MESSENGER (صلى الله عليه و سلم) USED TO FAST UNTIL WE THOUGHT HE WOULD NEVER BREAK HIS FAST, AND NOT FAST UNTIL WE THOUGHT HE WOULD NEVER FAST. I NEVER SAW THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH FASTING FOR AN ENTIRE MONTH EXCEPT IN RAMADAN, AND I NEVER SAW HIM FAST MORE THAN HE DID IN SHA'BAN."
(Bukharee and Muslim)

According to a report narrated by Muslim,

"HE USED TO FAST ALL OF SHA'BAN, HE USED TO FAST ALL BUT A LITTLE OF SHA'BAN."

A group of scholars, including Ibn Al-Mubarak and others, thought that the Prophet did not fast all of Sha'ban, but he fasted most of it.

This is supported by a report in Saheeh Muslim narrated from Ayshah (رضي الله عنها), who said:

"I NEVER KNEW OF HIM – MEANING THE PROPHET (صلى الله عليه و سلم) – FASTING FOR ANY ENTIRE MONTH APART FROM RAMADAN."

According to another report also narrated by Muslim, Ayshah (رضي الله عنها) said:

"I NEVER SAW HIM FAST FOR ANY ENTIRE MONTH FROM THE TIME HE CAME TO MADINAH, APART FROM RAMADAN."

It was reported in al-Bukharee and Muslim that Ibn 'Abbas (رضي الله عنه) said:

"THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH (صلى الله عليه و سلم) DID NOT FAST ANY ENTIRE MONTH APART FROM RAMADAN."

Ibn 'Abbas (رضي الله عنه) regarded it as makrooh to fast any entire month apart from Ramadan.

Ibn Hajar (رحيم الله) said:

"HE OBSERVED MORE VOLUNTARY FASTS IN SHA'BAN THAN IN ANY OTHER MONTH, AND HE USED TO FAST MOST OF SHA'BAN."

Usama Ibn Zayd (رضي الله عنه) said:

"I SAID, 'O MESSENGER OF ALLAH, I DO NOT SEE YOU FASTING IN ANY OTHER MONTH LIKE YOU FAST IN SHA'BAN.' HE SAID, 'THAT IS A MONTH TO WHICH PEOPLE DO NOT PAY ATTENTION, BETWEEN RAJAB AND RAMADAN, AND IT IS A MONTH IN WHICH DEEDS ARE LIFTED UP TO THE LORD OF THE WORLDS. I LIKE FOR MY DEEDS TO BE LIFTED UP WHEN I AM FASTING.'"
(Al-Nasa'i)

According to a report narrated by Abu Dawud, he said:

"THE MOST BELOVED OF MONTHS FOR THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH (صلى الله عليه و سلم) TO FAST IN WAS SHA'BAN, AND HIS FASTING IN SHA'BAN WAS CONTINUOUS WITH HIS FASTING IN RAMADAN."

Ibn Rajab (رحيم الله) said:

"FASTING IN SHA'BAN IS BETTER THAN FASTING IN THE SACRED MONTHS, AND THE BEST OF VOLUNTARY FASTS ARE THOSE THAT ARE (OBSERVED IN THE MONTHS) CLOSEST TO RAMADAN, BEFORE OR AFTER. THE STATUS OF THESE FASTS IS LIKE THAT OF AL-SUNAN AL-RAWATIB, WHICH IS DONE BEFORE AND AFTER FARD (OBLIGATORY PRAYERS) AND WHICH MAKES UP FOR ANY SHORTFALL IN THE NUMBER OF OBLIGATORY PRAYERS. THE SAME APPLIES TO FASTS OBSERVED BEFORE AND AFTER RAMADAN. JUST AS AL-SUNAN AL-RAWATIB ARE BETTER THAN OTHER KINDS OF VOLUNTARY PRAYERS, SO FASTS OBSERVED (IN THE MONTHS) BEFORE AND AFTER RAMADAN ARE BETTER THAN FASTS AT OTHER TIMES."

The phrase

"SHA'BAN IS A MONTH TO WHICH PEOPLE DO NOT PAY ATTENTION, BETWEEN RAJAB AND RAMADAN"

Indicates that because it comes between two important months, the Sacred Month of Rajab and the month of fasting, people are preoccupied with those two months and they do not pay attention to Sha'ban. Many people think that fasting in Rajab is better than fasting in Sha'ban, because Rajab is one of the Sacred Months, but this is not the case.

In the hadeeth quoted above there is an indication that even though certain times, places and people may be commonly thought to possess a particular virtue, there may be others that are better than them.

It also indicates that it is mustahab (recommended) to make good use of the times when people tend to be negligent, by doing acts of worship.

A group of the Salaf used to fill the time between Maghreb and 'Isha' with prayer, saying that it was a time when many people were negligent. Another example is the remembrance of Allah (dhikr) in the marketplace, because this means one is remembering Him in a place where people tend to be negligent and among people who are negligent. There are a number of benefits that come from making good use of times when people are often negligent, and using these times for worship, including the following:

It is more concealing of one's good works and hiding and concealing nawafil (supererogatory) actions is better, especially fasting, because it is a secret between a slave and his Lord.

Hence it was said that there is no element of showing off in fasting. One of the Salaf used to fast for years without anybody knowing about it; he would go from his home to the marketplace carrying two loaves of bread, which he would give away in charity, and he would fast. His family thought that he ate the bread, whilst the people in the marketplace thought that he had eaten at home. The Salaf thought it was mustahab for a person who was fasting to do things that would conceal the fact that he was fasting.

It was reported that Ibn Mas'ūd (رضي الله عنه) said:

"WHEN YOU GET UP IN THE MORNING AND YOU ARE FASTING, THEN APPLY PERFUME."

Qutadah (رحيم الله) said:

"IT IS MUSTAHAB FOR THE [MAN] WHO IS FASTING TO APPLY PERFUME SO THAT THERE WILL BE NO SIGN THAT HE IS FASTING."

By the same token, doing righteous deeds at times when people are distracted and negligent is more difficult. One of the indications of how virtuous a deed is how difficult it is: if everyone is doing a certain action, it is easy, but if most people are negligent, this makes it more difficult for those who do remember Allah.

Narrated by Ma'qil ibn Yasar (رضي الله عنه) that,

The Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم) said:

'WORSHIP AT TIMES OF TRIBULATION (FITNAH) IS LIKE HIJRAH TO ME.'
(Sahih Muslim)

(The phrase "worship at times of tribulation" refers to times of upheavals and trials, when people follow their own desires, and those who adhere to Islam are doing something difficult.)

The scholars differed as to the reasons why the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) fasted so much in Sha'ban.

Their various opinions were as follows:

That he had been unable to fast three days out of every month because he was travelling or for some other reason, so he made them all up together in Sha'ban. When the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) began to do some nafl (supererogatory) action, he would persist in it, and if he missed it, he would make it up later. It was said that his wives used to make up the days that they missed of Ramadan in Sha'ban, so he used to fast because of that.

This is the opposite of what was reported from 'Aishah (رضي الله عنها), that she used to delay making up days that she had missed in Ramadan until Sha'ban because she was too busy with the Messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه و سلم) to fast. It was said that it was because this is a month which people do not pay attention to.

This is the most correct view, because of the hadeeth of Usama (رضي الله عنه) quoted above, in which it says:

"THAT IS A MONTH TO WHICH PEOPLE DO NOT PAY ATTENTION, BETWEEN RAJAB AND RAMADAN."

When Sha'ban began, if the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) still had some voluntary fasts outstanding that he had not fasted, he would make them up during Sha'ban so that his nafl fasts would be complete before Ramadan came.

Similarly, if he had missed some Sunnah prayers or he had missed Qiyaam al-Layl (night prayer), he would make it up. 'Aishah (رضي الله عنها) used to make the most of this opportunity to make up any obligatory Ramadan fasts that she had missed because of menstruation; during other months she was too busy with the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) to fast.

We should also note here that anyone who has any missed fasts to make up has to make them up before the next Ramadan comes. It is not permissible to delay it until after the following Ramadan except in cases of necessity (such as a valid excuse that continues between the two Ramadan). Whoever is able to make them up before the (second) Ramadan and does not do so has to make them up after the (second) Ramadan and in addition to that, he has to repent and to feed one poor person for each day that he missed. This is the view of Malik, al-Shafa'i and Ahmad.

Another benefit of fasting in Sha'ban is that it is a kind of training for the Ramadan fast, in case a person finds it difficult to fast when Ramadan starts; if he fasts in Sha'ban he will have gotten used to fasting and he will feel strong and energetic when Ramadan comes. Sha'ban is like an introduction to Ramadan and it has some things in common with Ramadan, such as fasting, reciting Qur'an and giving in charity.

Salamah Ibn Suhayl (رضي الله عنه) used to say:

"THE MONTH OF SHA'BAN IS THE MONTH OF RECITERS (OF THE QUR'AN)."

Habeeb Ibn Abi Thabit used to say, when Sha'ban came,

"THIS IS THE MONTH OF RECITERS (OF THE QUR'AN)."

When Sha'ban came, 'Amr Ibn Qays al-Mala'i used to close his store and devote his time to reading the Qur'an.

FASTING AT THE END OF SHA'BAN:

It was reported in al-Bukharee and Muslim from 'Imran Ibn Husayn (رضي الله عنه) that,

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) said to a man,

"HAVE YOU FASTED ANYTHING OF THE SIRAR OF THIS MONTH?" HE SAID, "NO." HE SAID: "IF YOU HAVE NOT FASTED, THEN FAST TWO DAYS."

According to a report narrated by al-Bukharee:

I THINK HE MEANT RAMADAN. ACCORDING TO A REPORT NARRATED BY MUSLIM,

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) said:

"HAVE YOU FASTED ANYTHING OF THE SIRAR OF SHA'BAN?"

There was some dispute as to the meaning of the word sirar. The most well-known view is that it refers to the end of the month. The end of the month is called sirar because the moon is hidden at that time.

Someone may raise the point that it was reported in al-Bukharee and Muslim from Abu Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) that,

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) said:

"DO NOT PRE-EMPT RAMADAN BY ONE OR TWO DAYS, EXCEPT FOR THOSE WHO HAVE THE HABIT OF FASTING REGULARLY, IN WHICH CASE THEY MAY FAST."
(Bukharee and Muslim)

How can we reconcile the hadeeth which encourages fasting at this time with the hadeeth which says not to fast at this time? The answer is: many of the scholars and most of those who commented on this hadeeth said: this man to whom the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) addressed this question was known to have the habit of fasting regularly, or else he had made a vow, so the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) commanded him to make up his fast. There are also other points of view on this issue.

IN BRIEF WE MAY SAY THAT THERE ARE THREE SCENARIOS FOR FASTING AT THE END OF SHA'BAN:

The first scenario is when a person fasts at the end of Sha'ban with the intention of being on the safe side and not missing the first day of Ramadan. This is forbidden.
The second scenario is when a person fasts with the intention of fulfilling a vow or of making up a day of Ramadan that he missed or as an act of expiation (kaffarah), etc. This is permissible according to the majority.

The third scenario is when this is purely a voluntary fast. This is regarded as makrooh (disliked) by those who said that we should differentiate between Sha'ban and Ramadan by not fasting for a while. Among those who said this was al-Hasan. If it happens to coincide with a day when a person habitually fasts, Malik and those who agreed with him permitted this, but al-Shafa'i, al- 'Awza'i, Ahmad and others made a distinction between cases where it is a fast which a person habitually observes or otherwise.

In conclusion, the hadeeth of Abu Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) quoted above is what we should follow according to the majority of scholars. It is makrooh to observe a voluntary fast one or two days before Ramadan for those who do not habitually fast on those days and who have not previously fasted until the end of Sha'ban.

It may be asked: why is it makrooh to fast just before Ramadan (for those who do not have a prior habit of fasting)? The answer is that there are a number of reasons why this is so, such as:

Firstly: lest extra days be added to the fast of Ramadan that is not part of it. Fasting on the day of Eid is prohibited for the same reason, lest we fall into the same trap as the People of the Book with regard to fasting, as they added to their fasts because of their own whims and desires. For the same reason it is also forbidden to fast on the "day of doubt".

'Ammar (رضي الله عنه) said:

"WHOEVER FASTS ON THIS DAY HAS DISOBEYED ABU'L-QASIM (صلى الله عليه و سلم).

The "day of doubt" is a day when people are not sure whether it is Ramadan or not, when news of the sighting of the crescent moon comes from one whose word cannot be accepted. As for a cloudy day, some of the 'ulama' said that this was also a 'day of doubt' and said that fasting was not allowed on this day. This is the view of the majority.

Secondly: to make a distinction between fard (obligatory) fasts and nafl fasts, because making a clear distinction between fard actions and nafl actions is prescribed in Islam. Hence it is haram to fast on the day of Eid, and the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) forbade following an obligatory prayer immediately with another prayer unless they are separated by saying Salam or speaking, especially in the case of the Sunnah prayer performed just before Fajr. It is prescribed to make a clear separation between this prayer and the obligatory prayer. Hence it is prescribed to pray it at home and to lie down afterwards.

When the Prophet (صلى الله عليه و سلم) saw a man praying at the time when the Iqamah had been given for Fajr, he said to him:

"AL-SUBH IS FOUR RAK`AHS?"
(Bukharee)

Some ignorant people may think that the reason why we do not fast just before Ramadan is so that we can make the most of eating and have our fill of our desires before we have to deny ourselves by fasting. This is an ignorant mistake on the part of those who think this.